

Abby Ray

State Testimonial: February 21, 2012

I remember four years ago I was in the position that 183 8th graders are in today. I anxiously checked the mailbox every day awaiting a response on my acceptance or denial to the Ellis Clark Regional Agri-Science program. Fortunately I was one of the lucky individuals who was accepted. However, just last week Mr. Davenport had to deny admission to 93 students who simply can't be accommodated in our program. It isn't that they are not qualified or deserving or willing to work; our school does not get the funding needed per student from the state. We have the largest agriculture program in the state with over 300 students. We have 7 teachers who are passionate and ready to teach. However, we can't accommodate the 93 other students because we only receive funding for 90.

I honestly don't know where I would be without this program. I am so grateful I was admitted. When I opened my acceptance letter that chilly March afternoon I had no idea that this program would shape my life in such a dramatic way. Next year I plan on attending the University of Vermont with a major in Animal Sciences with a Pre-Veterinary concentration. I have been accepted to all of my schools. I have even had schools contact me to ask if I would attend their university. One school, Wells College, knew me on a first name basis. They offered me a \$40,000 scholarship before I had even heard of them. When I arrived on campus I was met by a secretary who knew me not as Abigail Ray, or a number in a system, but Abby. This astounded me. When I met with my admissions counselor we talked a lot about my work in the FFA. She was impressed with my resume and credentials, but was even more so with my ability to speak and conduct myself. These skills are something I never would have learned without agricultural education. "Ag kids" as we are known amongst the general school population, are

notorious for giving solid presentations, working diligently and well with others, and being respectful of adults in the school. In terms of my resume, colleges have been impressed with my long-standing involvement with this program. I held the office of Chapter President in 2010-2011, Junior Vice President in 2009-2010 and I have served as committee chairs on several permanent committees. One thing that the admissions officer commented on was the fact that I am not only job ready, but I am currently a tax-paying employee. How many educational systems can say that they are graduating students who are already active members in society? Moreover, how many schools can match our rate of 100% student employment during their high school years? Although these accomplishments are something I am very proud of they are not just unique to me. The students in the ag program truly want to be there and shine in this environment. Whether they hold offices, compete on teams, or have an outstanding work experience every student finds some way to be involved. I honestly don't think I would be where I am without this program. Unfortunately 93 students in my school alone will never experience what I have, and there are close to 1,100 students statewide that will be denied this opportunity because of the lack of funding from the state. Why should they miss out on this opportunity? Ask yourselves, if these were your children, would you deny them the chance to become a leader, get a jump-start on their career, or, perhaps, most importantly, discover their passion in life? Or would you find a way to make their dreams a reality and transform your promising, but undeveloped, adolescent into a polished young adult? On behalf of the students who will not be admitted this year I am here asking you to think of your own children or nieces and nephews or grandchildren when you consider allotting funding to these programs that have shaped not only my life, but the lives of thousands before me, and generations to come.